Ukraine to buy 100 Rafales from France

The aircraft suffered damage to its reputation when Pakistan shot down a fighter during the May war with India

PARIS: France's President Emmanuel Macron and his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky signed an accord on Monday for Kyiv to acquire up to 100 fighter jets and other hardware in a boost for Ukraine as it fights Russia's invasion.

Delivery of the Rafale fighter jets, the crown jewel of French combat aviation, is only foreseen under the letter of intent over a 10-year horizon, although the production of drones and interceptors would start by the end of this year, Macron said.

The announcement, made as Zelensky visited Paris, came with the Ukrainian leader in need of support after setbacks over the last week due to a corruption scandal at home, Russian forces closing in on the Ukrainian city of Pokrovsk and continued aerial attacks by Moscow.

Macron acknowledged that this was currently a "difficult moment" in the conflict. "Russia alone is making the choice to continue this war and to intensify it," he told reporters alongside Zelensky, accusing Russia of having an "addiction for war".

But the French leader said he hoped "peace will be obtained before 2027" when his own mandate expires, adding that there needed to be then a "regeneration" of the Ukrainian army so that it is "capable of dissuading any new incursion" by Russia.

The Ukrainian president has already signed a letter of intent to acquire 100 to 150 Swedish Gripen fighter jets.

Blow to reputation

The Rafale, French for a gust of wind, is a twin-jet fighter aircraft designed and built by Dassault Aviation. The French group defines it as "omnirole, able to carry out missions including in-depth strikes, nuclear deterrence, reconnaissance and anti-ship strikes".

The aircraft has seen combat in Afghanistan, Mali, Libya, Iraq and Syria. But it suffered a blow to its reputation when Pakistan shot down, by the firm's own admission, "at least one of the planes".—AFP

INDIGENOUS people attend a rally in Belem, Brazil, to call for climate justice and territorial protection during the UN conference.—Reuters

G20 contributions 'come nowhere close' to climate commitments: Greenpeace

Report says climate goals lack 'credible, actionable plans' to phase out fossil fuels

By Zaki Abbas

ISLAMABAD: A report launched by Greenpeace International at COP30 in Belem, Brazil, revealed insufficient climate ambition in the 2035 nationally determined contributions (NDCs) submitted by the G20 countries.

The report, 2035 Climate Ambition Gap, was released at the UN climate change conference as part of Greenpeace's call for governments to agree on a Global Response Plan to ensure the 1.5°C limit remains in reach, said a statement issued by the global climate NGO.

According to the statement, these major emitters account for almost 80 per cent of current emissions and around 85pc of global GDP, giving their policies outsized influence on global trade, investment and technology flows. In short, what G20 countries do - or fail to do - will determine whether the 1.5°C temperature limit remains in reach, it said, adding that within the G20, the developed countries bear the greatest responsibility, given their historic and current contribution to global emissions and their far greater capacity to act.

"Yet taken together as a group, G20 countries' submitted and announced 2035 targets would only lead to a reduction of 23% to 29% of their emissions compared to their emissions in 2019," Greenpeace said, calling the targets a serious shortfall compared to the global 60pc reduction agreed in the Global Stocktake two years ago.

"When the G20 countries - responsible for 80% of global emissions - deliver collective ambition that falls dangerously short, the world has a problem. With 85% of the global economy behind them, the G20's decisions shape trade, investment and technology worldwide. Their choices will make or break the 1.5°C goal, but their plans amount to just a 23-29% cut in emissions towards the 60% reduction globally that is needed," Tracy Carty, climate politics expert at Greenpeace International, said.

The report further said that all G20 country NDCs were failing to adequately contribute to the agreed energy transition. "They lack both the necessary commitment to phase out fossil fuels as well as quantified targets for progress related to renewables and energy efficiency developments," it said, adding that overall, G20 countries, home to the world's largest producers and consumers of fossil fuels, offered climate goals that conspicuously lacked credible, actionable plans to phase out the fuels driving the climate crisis.

It said at COP30, countries will need to adopt a Global Response Plan to tackle the mitigation ambition gap and ensure substantial and equitable progress is made in reducing greenhouse gas emissions and phasing out fossil fuels.

Jasper Inventor, deputy programme director at Greenpeace International, said, "At this COP we are fighting for a Global Response Plan to bridge the 1.5°C ambition gap. That must include a roadmap to phase out fossil fuels and include an action plan to end deforestation. We've seen progress in week one, but we need an outcome that leads to change and not just another roadmap to nowhere."

"We must ensure COP30 leads to urgent action to phase out fossil fuels and fast-track renewables. But it must also yield progress for crucially needed climate finance, including steps towards making polluters pay for climate damages and a just transition. COP30 must deliver an outcome that accelerates real action."

The report said currently fossil fuel use was responsible for around 70pc of greenhouse gas emissions, and emissions from fossil fuel use had increased by more than 60pc since 1990. "The 43 member countries of the G20, including the EU27 but excluding the African Union, made up for 77% of emissions in 2023," it added.

In its recent Advisory Opinion on the obligations of states with respect to climate change, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) underlined the importance of phasing out fossil fuel use in order to achieve the goals of the Paris Agreement and stop global warming, it added.

In the 2015 Paris Agreement, countries committed to "holding the increase in the global average temperature to well below 2°C above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels".

McCartney to release silent song against AI law

LONDON: Pop legend Paul McCartney will release a silent music track next month as part of a silent album to protest Britain's copyright law changes that would give exemptions to tech firms.

Other artists such as Hans Zimmer and singer Kate Bush have joined the project, highlighting what they say are the dangers artificial intelligence (AI) poses to creativity.

McCartney's contribution to the album, Is This What We Want, will draw "attention to the damning impact on artists' livelihoods controversial government proposals could cause".

It is a two minute 45 seconds recording of an empty studio featuring a series of clicks.

More than 1,000 artists, including Annie Lennox, Damon Albarn and Jamiroquai, have collaborated on the silent album, which was released in February.

They maintain that the government's law changes "would make it easier to train AI models on copyrighted work without a licence".

"Under the heavily criticised proposals, UK copyright law would be upended to benefit global tech giants. AI companies would be free to use an artist's work to train their AI models without permission or remuneration," they added.

The changes "would require artists to proactively opt-out from the theft of their work, reversing the very principle of copyright law", they added.

Only 1,000 copies of the vinyl album have been pressed.

In May, some 400 writers and musicians, including Elton John, condemned the proposals as a "wholesale giveaway" to Silicon Valley in a letter to The Times newspaper.

Other signatories included the 83-year-old McCartney, singer-songwriters Ed Sheeran, Dua Lipa and Sting, and writers Kazuo Ishiguro, Michael Morpurgo and Helen Fielding.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer has previously said the government needs to "get the balance right" with copyright and AI while noting that the technology represented "a huge opportunity".

"They have no right to sell us down the river," Elton John told the BBC in May, urging Starmer to "wise up" and "see sense".

According to a study by UK Music last week two out of three artists and producers fear that AI poses a threat to their careers.

More than nine out of 10 surveyed demanded that their image and voice to be protected and called for AI firms to pay for the use of their creations.—AFP

US resolution

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to Palestinian self-determination and statehood", but makes nearly every element of Gaza's reconstruction — including the operations of the proposed ISF — subject to approval by the BOP and Israel.

The 'blue draft' of the US-sponsored resolution — shared with other members of the Security Council ahead of Monday's vote — seeks recognition for the BOP as an entity with "international legal personality", and calls on the World Bank and other financial institutions to establish a dedicated trust fund to support reconstruction and development efforts.

In addition, a Transitional Peace Council — to be chaired by President Trump — is envisioned as being tasked with overseeing Gaza's affairs until December 2027. Operational entities working under this council will be financed through voluntary donor contributions and government support. The text stresses that these bodies would function as transitional administrations, not political governments.

The resolution also seeks UNSC authorisation for the proposed ISF until the end of 2027, making it contingent on approval from the BOP, Israel and Egypt.

"The ISF shall work with Israel and Egypt, without prejudice to their existing agreements, along with the newly trained and vetted Palestinian police force, to help secure border areas; stabilise the security environment in Gaza by ensuring the process of demilitarizing the Gaza Strip," it says.

Its primary role would be to assist the BoP in monitoring the implementation of the ceasefire in Gaza, and will be funded through voluntary contributions.

Israeli withdrawal

One key revision concerns Israel's withdrawal. Tel Aviv's forces would withdraw in "standards, phases and timetables" linked to a disarmament process negotiated among the Israeli military, the international force and guarantor states — including the United States.

Importantly, the 'blue draft' – a term used to denote versions of resolutions that are cleared for introduction before the Security Council – envisions the Palestinian Authority (PA) taking over the administration of Gaza following a comprehensive reform programme.

When the PA, which is currently responsible for the West Bank and other Palestinian territories, is "securely and effectively take back control of Gaza", the resolution envisions that Washington will "establish a dialogue between Israel and the Palestinians to agree on a political horizon for peaceful and prosperous coexistence".

This language indicates broader recognition in the West for the "two-state solution" and charts a path for Palestinian statehood.

The resolution also calls on all UNSC "member states and international organisations to work with the BoP to identify opportunities to contribute personnel, equipment, and financial resources to its operating entities and the ISF, to provide technical assistance to its operating entities and the ISF, and to give full recognition to its acts and documents."

Egypt's significance

Egypt was the first Arab nation to recognise Israel and establish formal diplomatic ties in 1979. The move led to the return of the Sinai Peninsula, occupied by Israel in 1967, and the signing of security arrangements that included limits on military deployments in the region.

The Camp David Accords were signed by Egyptian president Anwar Sadat and Israeli PM Menachem Begin. The accords, negotiated in secret at a US presidential retreat located in Maryland, laid the foundation for ties between the two nations.

However, the United Nations condemned the move, as there was no Palestinian participation. There was widespread opposition in Egypt and the wider Arab world to the peace treaty, and Sadat was later assassinated during a military parade in Cairo in 1981.

B'desh asks India to extradite Hasina

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the best interests of the people of Bangladesh, including in peace, democracy, inclusion and stability," its ministry said in a statement that does not directly address the issue of potential extradition.

Hasina's 15-year tenure saw widespread human rights abuses, including the mass detention and extrajudicial killings of her political opponents.

Bangladesh last year said it would request an Interpol red notice for Hasina, but there was no record on the global police body alert law enforcement list.

The country has been in political turmoil since the end of Hasina's autocratic rule, and violence has marred campaigning for elections expected in February 2026.

The United Nations says up to 1,400 people were killed in crackdowns as Hasina tried to cling to power, deaths that were central to her trial.

Historic verdict

Attorney General Md Asaduzzaman said the trial "pays the dues to the martyrs". Bangladesh's interim leader Muhammad Yunus welcomed the verdict.

"The awarding of death sentences to Sheikh Hasina and Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal in the crimes against humanity case is a historic verdict," he said in a statement.

He called for calm and warned against any "attempt to violate public order", urging "everyone to refrain from any indisciplined acts".

The UN said Hasina's sentencing for crimes against humanity marked "an important moment for victims", but she should not have been sentenced to death.

Since publishing the report, "we have been calling for perpetrators — including individuals in positions of command and leadership — to be held accountable in accordance with international standards", rights office spokeswoman Ravina Shamdasani said in a statement.

"We have also called for victims to have access to effective remedies and reparation," she added.

However, she stressed that the office had also "consistently advocated for all accountability proceedings — especially on charges of international crimes — to unquestionably meet international standards of due process and fair trial".

"We ... regret the imposition of the death penalty, which we oppose in all circumstances." the spokeswoman added.

Deepening crisis

Security forces surrounded the court for the verdict, with armoured vehicles guarding checkpoints and thousands of police officers posted across the capital.

Crude bombs have been set off across Dhaka this month, mainly petrol bombs hurled at everything from buildings linked to Yunus's government to buses and Christian sites.

The International Crisis Group said the "political repercussions of this verdict are significant", arguing that the prospect of Hasina "mounting a political comeback in Bangladesh now appears very slim".

"The process has not been without critics," ICG analyst Thomas Kean said.

"In absentia trials are often a source of contention, and in this case the speed with which the hearings were conducted and the apparent lack of resources for the defence also raise questions of fairness... But they should not be used to downplay or deflect from Sheikh Hasina's actions."—AFP

Cervical cancer vaccine push has 'saved 1.4m lives'

GENEVA: A three-year campaign to bring vaccines against human papillomavirus (HPV) to low-income countries has prevented 1.4 million cervical cancer deaths, the vaccine alliance Gavi said on Monday.

"An estimated 86 million girls are now protected against the leading cause of cervical cancer, thanks to a concerted three-year effort by Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance and lower-income countries," the organisation said.

It added in a statement to mark World Cervical Cancer Elimination Day that "an estimated 1.4 million future deaths" had been prevented. Cancer caused by HPV disproportionately affects low-income countries, which often lack screening services and access to treatment.

These countries accounted for 90 percent of the 350,000 cervical cancer deaths recorded in 2022, according to Gavi.

The organisation's chief executive, Sania Nishtar, credited the "incredible commitment" of countries and organisations for helping to reach the target of protecting 86 million girls.

Gavi said that across Africa, the coverage rate for the vaccine had risen from four percent of girls in 2014 to 44 percent at the end of 2024, higher than in Europe, on 38 percent.

The alliance said it used economies of scale to bring down prices and make vaccines available to about 50 poorer countries.

"Gavi secured commitments from manufacturers to invest in HPV vaccines — and the price of HPV vaccines in Gavi-supported countries is now between $2.90 and $5.18 per dose, compared with US$100 or more elsewhere," said the statement.—AFP

S. Africa says 'suspicious' flights from Israel an 'agenda to cleanse Gaza'

JOHANNESBURG: South Africa said on Monday the surprise arrival of 153 Palestinians on a plane last week indicated "a clear agenda to cleanse Palestinians" out of the Gaza Strip and the occupied West Bank.

The group landed in Johannesburg on a chartered flight on Thursday without departure stamps from Israel in their passports.

Reports said a shadowy organization, Al Majd, was involved in their travel from Gaza.

"We are suspicious, as the South African government, about the circumstances surrounding the arrival of the plane," Foreign Minister Ronald Lamola told reporters.

South African border police kept the group on the plane for 12 hours before President Cyril Ramaphosa allowed them entry on a standard 90-day visa exemption.

It emerged later that a first plane carrying 176 Palestinians had arrived on Oct 28, according to Gift of the Givers, a charity that is assisting the arrivals.

"We do not want any further flights to come our way because this is a clear agenda to cleanse out Palestinians out of Gaza and the West Bank and those areas, which South Africa is against," Lamola said.

"It does look like it represents a broader agenda to remove Palestinians from Palestine into many different parts of the world, and is a clearly orchestrated operation," he said.

'Misled'

South Africa, which is set to host world leaders at the G20 summit this weekend, is seen as one of the strongest supporters of the Palestinian cause.

Pretoria filed a case against Israel with the International Court of Justice in 2023, accusing it of `genocide' in Gaza.

According to the Gift of the Givers NGO, the Palestinians it is assisting said they had paid around $2,000 per person to Al Majd for the trip and did not know they were going to South Africa.

"What we've been told is that they were promised some type of travel out of Gaza to some form of safety in a country that would welcome them," representative Sarah Oosthuizen said.

Some of the passengers appeared to have been misled about their final destination, with a few believing they were headed to Indonesia, Malaysia or India, she said.

Travellers in the first group "definitely did not know that they were coming to South Africa", Oosthuizen said.

The second plane, which carried a group including men, women and children, flew from Israel's Ramon airport to Nairobi before boarding the chartered plane to Johannesburg, she said.

The accommodation they had been promised on arrival turned out to have been booked for only up to a week and "when they were settled in these accommodations, their contact with Al Majd went silent", Oosthuizen said.

Some of the group had told the NGO that they wished to apply for asylum, she said.

'Deceived families'

The Palestinian embassy in South Africa said Thursday the travel of both groups "was arranged by an unregistered and misleading organisation that exploited the tragic humanitarian conditions of our people in Gaza". The group had "deceived families, collected money from them, and facilitated their travel in an irregular and irresponsible manner", it said.

When reporters in Jerusalem tried to contact Al Majd, none of the numbers listed on their website were in service. Their linked address only led to the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Sheikh Jarrah.

Israeli authorities said at the weekend that the 153 Palestinians had been allowed to leave Gaza after receiving "approval from a third country to receive them", without naming the country in question.—AFP